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## SIGRDRÍFA-BRYNHILD

Ever since Germanic legends were first studied, the Valkyrie episode has been a stumbling-block for investigators; and any new attempt to enter the controversy may seem an act of temerity. Such a step is, however, provoked by a new and, in some respects, revolutionizing contribution by F. Panzer.<sup>1</sup> Here the author approaches the heroic legend (*heldensage*) entirely through folktale (*märchen*). Though many scholars have suggested the relationship between fairy-tales and the Sigfrid story, no one has, before Panzer, examined the legend entirely from that point of view. The conclusions reached by Panzer are that the legend of Sigfrid goes back to three distinct *märchen* types: (1) the *bärensohn* type, the source of the *erlösungs sage* or *erweckungssage*<sup>2</sup> (i. e., the liberating or the awakening of the maiden on the mountain); (2) the *brautwerber* type, source of Sigfrid's wooing for Gunther; and (3) *Das Märchen vom bedingten Leben*. Concerning no. 1, Panzer concludes that from it, as a unified whole,<sup>3</sup> comes the story of Sigurd's slaying the dragon, of his passing through the flame wall, and of his awakening the sleeping maiden. Furthermore, he decides, on the basis of *Seyfriedslied*, *Fáfnir*,<sup>4</sup> *Gríp*, and a Norw. *stev*,<sup>5</sup> that this maiden is Krimhild.

The results of Panzer's investigation throw new light on our subject, and have, also, opened the way for further investigation. Many points in the conclusions can, however, not be accepted; for they have too often been made on the unsound basis that, if similarities are found in heroic legend and in folktale, the former must have been derived from the latter. A note of warning, on this score, has been struck by Polak,<sup>6</sup> who suggests that the similarities shown may have developed as a result of contact between the *märchen* and the developed *heldensage*. Other points need further substantiation before they are accepted.

<sup>1</sup> *Sigfrid*, Vol. II of *Stud. z. Germ. Sagengeschichte*, München, 1912.

<sup>2</sup> Panzer (p. 124-125) considers the *erweckungssage* a later development of the *erlösungs sage*.

<sup>3</sup> With certain additions from the story of *Starke Hans*, cf. Panzer, p. 44.

<sup>4</sup> All references to the Elder Edda are to the edition by Sijmonds, Halle, 1906.

<sup>5</sup> Lanstad: *Folkeviser*. p. 124.

<sup>6</sup> Polak: *Eng. Stud.* 46, 279 (Review of Panzer).

In this paper, I wish to point out a few phases of the development of the legends which, it seems to me, Panzer and other recent investigators have not taken sufficiently into account. I shall, as far as possible, limit the discussion to the so-called Valkyrie episode, or the *erweckungs* episode, and try to establish for it a definite position in the development of the legend.

For an understanding of the relative place of the *erweckungs* episode, the evidence of the English sources is important, chiefly because of its negative nature. English sources do not know the sleeping beauty (i.e., the Valkyrie). *Beowulf*, l. 875 ff., relates how Sigmund, with Fitela as companion, engaged in many adventures, and further, how he, this time without the aid of Fitela, slew the dragon and carried off the hoard. That this passage refers to incidents identical with, or parallel to, those of Sigmund and Sinfjötla in the *Völsungasaga*, ch. 6 ff., is admitted by everyone. Many critics also admit that the dragon fight is the famous Fáfnir episode later connected with the name of Sigurðr, Sigmund's son.<sup>7</sup> The evidence of *Beowulf*, therefore, suggests that the dragon fight and the liberation of the sleeping maiden are, originally, distinct, and militates against the theory of Panzer that these motives belong together and were derived, as a unit, from the *bärensohnmärchen*.<sup>8</sup>

But a comparison of *Beowulf* with other (English) sources leads us even farther; it suggests that the *erweckungs* episode, and Sigfrid with it, has no place in the original Volsung story. Because of the name form, it has often been taken for granted that Sigmund, Sigfrid, and Sigelind, or Signy, originally belong together. This I believe incorrect. The real Volsung story ends with the death of Siggeir and Signy and the consummated revenge of Sig-

<sup>7</sup> Sijmons, *Grundr.* III, 654, in a note directed against Mogk rejects this interpretation: "Wenn man freilich mit Mogk auf die alleinige autorität des Beowulf-Interpolators hin sich berechtigt glaubt, Drachentötung und Hortgewinnung, als urspr. zur Sigmundssage gehörig, aus der Sigfridsage auszuscheiden, lässt sich ihr mythischer Gehalt leicht verflüchtigen."

<sup>8</sup> I grant that the dragon fight is a motive that is easily attributed in a general way to any hero to increase his reputation. The few details given in *Beowulf* have, I admit, been used both for and against an identification with the Fáfnir episode. Another possibility is that a distinct dragon episode has been connected with each of the heroes. The *Seyfridslied* would then preserve that originally belonging to *erweckungs* episode. This is, however, improbable. Cf. Panzer, p. 35.

mund—or at least with the death of Sigmund. Here there is no room for Sigfrid and the Valkyrie.<sup>9</sup>

Other evidence for the existence of the Volsung story, without the addition of Sigfrid or the valkyrie, is given by the first *Riddle* of the *Exeter Book*.<sup>10</sup> The lay, entitled by Schofield *The Lament of Signy*, suggests the situation of Signy at the time she sends Sinfjötla (Fitela) to the aid of her brother. One might object that the poem allows no room for the Sigfrid story. This I grant; the fact remains, however, that the Sigmund-Signy story has been known in England<sup>11</sup> as a separate unit. We find, then, that the evidence of *Beowulf*—the oldest, we have concerning the Volsungs—connects the dragon fight with Sigmund, and, furthermore, that other English sources confirm the separation of Sigmund and Sigfrid. We must, therefore, conclude that, in the continental sources of the English legends the dragon fight and the *erweckungssage* were distinct.

We turn next to the German sources to see what evidence they offer concerning the early existence of the Valkyrie motif (or the *erweckungssage*) and concerning its position in the development of the Volsung legends. The *Nibelungenlied* has lost entirely the primitive version of Sigfrid's youth and has substituted an account more in keeping with the courtly epic. The poem contains no unquestioned reference to an earlier, now lost, *erweckungssage*. The dragon fight and the winning of the hoard are, however, not unknown to the poet though all references are vague and indefinite. They are definitely connected with Sigfrid not Sigmund. The inference seems possible that the poet, though he might have heard of the *erweckungssage* in connection with Sigfrid, still has not seen any intimate relationship between that and the

<sup>9</sup> This is borne out, according to Mogk: *Grundr.* II, 618, by the Helgi Lays of the Elder Edda. Of *H. H.* I, Mogk says: "Nur Scheint der Verfasser die Sigmunds sage noch *unverbunden* mit der Sigurð sage gekannt zu haben."

If, furthermore, Bugge is right in his claims, *Helged.* p. 173, that the Helgi Lays originated in England and that there the Volsungs were first incorporated in the Helgi stories, we have still further evidence for the existence in England of the Volsung stories as distinct from the Sigfrid stories.

<sup>10</sup> If we accept the interpretation given by Professor Schofield: *P. M. L. A.* XVII, 262.

<sup>11</sup> Whether or not the theory of Professor Lawrence, *P. M. L. A.* XVII, 247, of the translation of the Lay from O.N., be accepted or not, in no way affects our investigation.

the dragon fight and has therefore dropped the episode which conflicted with the rest of his plot.<sup>12</sup>

*Das Lied von Hürnen Seyfrid*,<sup>13</sup> on the other hand makes the freeing of the maid the central theme. The motive is not, however, that of the sleeping beauty (die *erweckungssage*), but the parallel motive of liberation of the maid (Panzer: *erlösungssage*), from the power of the dragon.<sup>14</sup> The ballad knows the story of Sigfrid's youth in the grotesque form familiar to us from the ON. *Þiðrekssaga* a popular development on the basis of the same original as the more conservative reports of the *Edda* and *Völsungasaga* we have an elaborate and corrupt narrative of how Seyfrid, by the help of the dwarfs, slew the giant Kuperan, the guardian of the *drachenstein*, and the dragon with its sixty young, and carried off the princess (here Krimhild, daughter of Gybich) and the hoard.

Though the value of material offered by this 16th cent. ballad has too often been overlooked, I feel that Panzer<sup>15</sup> goes to the other extreme when he finds here the most primitive form of the legend. On the basis of the ballad, the original of which he places, probably correctly, at the latest in 1250,<sup>16</sup> he determines that the dragon fight and the winning of the hoard originally belonged together with the *erlösungssage*, and that the maid, who figures in the episode, is none other than Krimhild, daughter of Gibich. The foundation of the legend is, he maintains, the folk-tales. The first of these contentions we have already found improbable because of the conflicting evidence of the English sources as well as of the *N. L.* The second has nothing in support of it except a curious Norwegian *stev*<sup>17</sup> which to me seems insufficient. The passages

<sup>12</sup> Golther: *Stud. z. Germ. Sagengesch., Abh. d. Bayr. Akad.*, XVIII, Sec. 2, p. 401 ff., 1888-1889, argues strongly the existence of the Valkyrie episode, or the *erweckungssage* in German sources. This he considers a late Norse contribution to the legend.

Sijmons: *Grundr.* III, 654 and *Z. f. d. Ph.* 24, p. 1 maintains that the Valkyrie episode is part and parcel of the German story and goes back to Germanic myths. His position is fairly representative of the older interpretation, which goes back to the Grimms, Lachmann, Müllenhoff, etc.

<sup>13</sup> Ed. of Golther: *Neudrucke deutschen Litteraturwerke*, Halle, 1889.

<sup>14</sup> For outline of the plot see Panzer: *Sigfrid*, p. 2 ff.

<sup>15</sup> Loc. cit. p. 125.

<sup>16</sup> p. 32.

<sup>17</sup> Landstad, *Norske Folkeviser*, p. 124:

Og ha' eg no vorið kar fer meg  
som han var han Sigurð svein

from *Grípisspá* and *Fáfnismál* cited in support are certainly misinterpreted.<sup>18</sup>

The strong evidence of the *Seyf.* for the existence of the *erlösungs-sage* in Germany is rightly stressed by Panzer. That the ballad presents an episode parallel to the Valkyrie motive of the Norse sources he clearly shows. He supports his view by reference to the *lectulus Brunhildae*,<sup>19</sup> a name that decidedly points in the same direction. Both the Norse and the German versions, he traces to the *Bärensohn* and *Starke Hans märchen* and even the flame ride of the Edda he parallels in the folk tales.<sup>20</sup>

The origin of the legend in the *märchen* seems to me improbable. The parallels cited by Panzer do, however, throw light on the problem. The explanation that the legend has been strongly influenced by the related folk tale seems more probable, and the chances are great that the comparatively late *Seyfrl.* has been especially subject to this influence. Nothing in the ballad suggests that its version is fundamental. The placing of Krimhild in the *erlösungs-sage* much rather suggests a late confusion possibly due to the contact with the *N. L.* The closer parallel of this version with the ballad would then heighten the probability of influence by, rather than origin in, the *märchen*.

The *O.N. Þiðriks Saga*,<sup>21</sup> which really presents Saxon material, is nearest of all sources to the version of the *Seyfr.* Of the *erlösungs-sage*, there is, however, no clear account, but many details point to its originally being in the saga sources.

*D.S. c. 273* relates that, after slaying Mimir, Sigurd goes to the Castle of Brynhild where he breaks his way through the iron gates. The impetuous fellow is well received by Brynhild, who entertains him well and presents him with the horse Grani.

The force of this episode is entirely lost—even to the writer himself; no apparent reason for it is given. But to one familiar with other versions the first suggestion is that we have a corrupt version of the *erlösungs-sage*.<sup>22</sup> The mention of the horse Grani

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sá ha' eg silt skotið flogdrakin  
og Guro sill drassa en heim.

<sup>18</sup> See discussion of these sources below pp. 70 ff.

<sup>19</sup> p. 125.

<sup>20</sup> p. 110.

<sup>21</sup> Bertelson: *Þiðriks Saga af Bern*, Köb. 1905-1911.

<sup>22</sup> Panzer, p. 48, rightly cites in support of this the statement in ch. 319 (Unger's ed. ch. 226-227) that Brynhild and Sigurd were betrothed at their first meeting.

points to a story similar to the flame ride of O.N. accounts.<sup>23</sup> In fact, all jumbled details of the saga point to the presence of the *erlösungs* motive in the German sources.

The question of the *erlösungs* motive becomes much more complicated in the O.N. sources: for here it has been thoroughly confused with the episode of Sigurd's wooing for Gunnar (Panzer: *Die Werbungssage*).<sup>24</sup>

The O.N. account runs as follows: After slaying Fáfnir and Regin, and carrying off the hoard on Grani, Sigurð rides to Hindarfjall (Vols.<sup>25</sup> ch. 20, *Fáfnm.* str. 44, prose) where he, after penetrating the flame hedge, wakes the Valkyrie Sigrdrífa (*Fáfnm.*, 42-44), or Brynhildr (Vols. 20, *Nþ.* <sup>26</sup> ch. 6). According to other sources (*Gríp.* 13, *Sg. Sk.*, 1, and possibly *Fáfnm.* 41), he rides, after slaying Fáfnir, directly to the court of Gjuki. Then he rides to Hindarfjall (*Gríp.* 15). A pledging of troths takes place on the mountain (Vols. ch. 21, l.32). Another meeting and wooing takes place at the castle of Brynhild's foster father (Vols. 24, *Gríp.* 27 ff., *Helr.* 12, *Sg. sk.* 37). Then follows Sigurd's marriage to Guðrun and his wooing of Brynhild for Gunnar. Here the sources agree except as to the manner in which Sigurð won Br. for Gunnar.

The *werbungs* motive and *erlösungs*, or *erweckungs* motive are drawn much closer than in the German sources. The Vols.,<sup>25</sup> *Nþ.*,<sup>26</sup> *Helr.* identify the heroines of the two episodes;<sup>27</sup> but *Gríp.* and Snorre's Edda carefully differentiate between the two Brynhilds.

Many suggestions have been made as to the possible growth of the Norse versions. Golther defends the *Gríp.* and *Sn. Edda* and relegates Sigrdrífa and the whole *erweckungssage* to the minor additions purely Norse in origin and playing no part in the general legend. The violation of texts necessary for the support of this theory is sufficient to make it untenable. Sijmons<sup>28</sup> opposes

<sup>23</sup> Panzer's (p. 195) idea that this gives a faded reference to wooing by strength tests, as in N. L., is untenable.

<sup>24</sup> In the German sources these episodes do not come in conflict except in the loose references in the Þ. S.,

<sup>25</sup> *Volsunga Saga*, ed. by Ranisch, Berlin, 1908.

<sup>26</sup> *Norna gests þáttur*, ed. Wilken.

<sup>27</sup> We have earlier seen that the Þ. S. agrees.

<sup>28</sup> *Z. f. d. Ph.* 24, 1 ff.

Golther. He also, however, rejects the *erlösungssage* as a separate part of the original legend. The flame ride he considers originally a part of the *werbungssage*. The order of events necessitated by this reconstruction, Sijmons justifies by *Gríp.* and *Fáfnm.* As this would bar the *erlösungssage* from the sources of the Völs.—Nibl. legends, the reconstruction must be rejected; for the material submitted by Panzer clearly establishes that episode in the German sources.

Last comes Panzer's reconstruction. Following the interpretation of *Fáfnm.* 40-41 suggested by Sijmons, he claims that Sigurð goes directly to Gjuki, after the victory over Fáfnir. Here, however, Panzer's interpretation diverges greatly from that of earlier critics. Drawing a parallel between *Fáfnm.* and the *Seyfridslied*, he declares that the maid awakened on Hindarfjall is the Burgundian princess Guðrun (Krimhild) whom Sigurð brings back to Gjuki's court and marries. In support he cites *Gríp.* 13 ff. and the Norw. *stev*,<sup>29</sup> Panzer considers *Sigrdrífa* an appellative applied to Guðrun-Krimhild.

Though the reconstruction would greatly simplify matters, it cannot be accepted. The argument for the existence of the *erlösungssage* in the German sources is, I think, conclusive; but the weakness of Panzer's theory comes in his identification of the heroine of this episode with Guðrun.

Do the O.N. sources support the *Seyfr.*? I cite *Fáfnm.* str. 40 ff., mainstay of Panzer's theory:

(40) Bind, Sigurðr, the red rings, it is not kingly to speak much; a maiden, I know, the fairest by far, adorned with gold, if you are able to win her (*geta mættir*).

(41) Green paths stretch to Gjuki, fate points the way to the wanderer; there the mighty king has reared a daughter, whom you (Sig.) may buy with bridal gifts.

(42) A hall there is on high Hindarfjall, swept about by fire; wise men made it of the undark light of the stream.

(43) I know on the mountain a valkyrie sleeps, and the destroyer of the linden (i.e. the flame) plays over her; Yggr struck her with a thorn, when she slew another than he wished.

(44) You can see under the helmet the maid, who rode Vingskornir from the battle; *Sigrdrífa* (*siegespenderin*) can

<sup>29</sup> Quoted p. 8, note 3.



not, Prince of the Volsungs, break the sleep because of the decree of the norns.

Here I fail to see any corroboration of Panzer's reconstruction; and, if this passage does not support his theory we can freely dismiss the Gríp., for that is clearly based on *Fáfnir*. "Green paths" lead to Gjuki (*Fáfnir* 41), not to Hindarfjall where the Valkyrie sleeps. But Sigurð comes to Hindarfjall on his way to Gjuki. This interpretation is borne out by the prose after str. 44, which certainly does not connect Hindarfjall with Gjuki's daughter. Furthermore, why does *Sdm.*, which is so closely connected with *Fáfnir*, that Mogk<sup>30</sup> attributes them to the same author, contain no hint of Gjuki? And, again, why does every other source make a distinction between Sigdrífa-Brynhild and Guðrun? No trait of the valkyrie is attributed to Guðrun in any source where the identity is established. The *p. S.* militates against the interpretation, for in its sources Brynhild certainly has figured in the *erlösungssage*. How then has the *Seyfr.* come to identify Krimhild with the *erlösungssage*? Here I feel that the *N. L.* has had its influence. Panzer<sup>31</sup> has himself made clear the strong impression left by the *N. L.* upon the *Seyfr.* In the *N. L.*, the *erlösungssage* motive, is lost, and Krimhild is the central figure. It is not improbable to suppose that the author of the *Seyfr.*, whose conception of the legend certainly is very muddled, has transferred the name.

Everything we know of the growth of the Volsung-Niblung legends militates against the identification of Krimhild with the Brynhild of the *erlösungssage*. Krimhild is Burgundian, and, if Sigfrid becomes connected with her after the fusion of Burgundian and Frankish legends, what does there remain as a nucleus of the Sigfrid story? I have already shown that Sigfrid was not originally the slayer of Fáfnir. If we place Brynhild in the Burgundian legends and the dragon fight in the Volsung legends, we have no Sigfrid story left. Panzer's own tracing of the *erlösungssage* to a set of sources entirely different from the *werbungssage* is in itself the strongest argument against placing Krimhild in the former.

The original Sigfrid story centres about the waking and freeing of a maiden (O.N. Sigdrífa, or Brynhild), to whom he now is betrothed.<sup>32</sup> As he rides out in the world, he is led to forget

<sup>30</sup> *Grundr.* II, 629.

<sup>31</sup> p. 54.

<sup>32</sup> The attributing of the characteristics of Valkyrie to this maid is, in all probability, a special Norse development.

his lady.<sup>33</sup> This legend after fusion with the Volsung legends, is combined with the Burgundian traditions. Guðrun is supplanted by the Burgundian Krimhild. After Sigfrid is assigned the role of the helper in the *werbung*s episode, it is a natural step in the development that the princess wooed for Gunther be identified with the maid deserted by Sigfrid. Later Norse sources fully identify the two Brynhilds and transfer many of the characteristics of the *erweckungssage* to the *werbungssage*.<sup>34</sup>

#### SUMMARY

The Sigfrid story is then originally distinct from the Volsung and the Burgundian legends. Its central theme is the *erlösungs-sage*. The main points in the growth may be as follows:

1. Sigfrid grows up in the woods probably fostered by the smith Mimir (Regin).
2. Riding forth to adventure, he penetrates the flame-hedge and wakes, or liberates, a sleeping princess, whom he woos.
3. After his departure, he forgets his betrothed and probably marries another.<sup>35</sup>
4. Sigfrid helps Gunther woo a princess, later identified with the princess first wooed by Sigfrid.
5. In transmission to the North many changes are made in details; the Valkyrie is a northern development.

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<sup>33</sup> He may have married Guðrun, or he may in some other way have been prevented from returning to Sd. Br.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Heusler: *Die Lieder der Lücke*, p. 14.

<sup>35</sup> Between 3 and 4 would fall the fusion of Vols. and Sigf. legends.